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ABSTRACT

Young and old joining together in intergenerational projects where they share their insights, skills, and experiences can strengthen community ties and improve the well-being of all participants. This bulletin explores ways both younger and older members of a community can work together on a crime prevention initiative. Such a partnership in prevention can help organize neighborhoods; decrease vandalism; provide a service to the elderly; and offer mentors to young people. Suggestions are provided on how to start a two-generation crime prevention program. Ways to keep the project going and some of the anticipated challenges of running such a project are also discussed. Several questions can be considered to help evaluate whether the project has met the original goals. Does it eliminate or reduce stereotypes about youth and seniors? Has it helped reduce older citizens' fears of youth in the community? Has it raised community members' awareness of problems in their neighborhood? Performing a follow-up survey several months into the project will show whether attitudes have changed, whether fears have decreased, and what positive discoveries each group has made about the other. A list of seven resources is included. (JDM)

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NATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK

Youth in action

July 1999 NUMBER 05

OJJDP BULLETIN

Two Generations—Partners in Prevention

What Is an Intergenerational Program?

This term may sound complicated, but the concept is simple: youth and older people help each other and work together on a community problem to prevent and reduce crime. With "baby boomers" (those born between 1946 and 1964) beginning to age, and life expectancies continuing to increase, the number of middle-age and older Americans in the United States is increasing. Older Americans (those over age 55), in fact, are now the fastest growing age group in the Nation. They are also very different from previous generations of older people.

Nowadays, older Americans are in better health than their parents or grandparents were and can contribute more time and energy than past generations could. They are also more likely to be able to continue contributing for many more years. With retirees often having time to volunteer for causes they care about, today's older generation may be—next to youth—the most underused resource in the country! This Bulletin explores ways for youth and older members of the community to work together on any kind of crime prevention initiative.

How can youth help seniors? By installing sturdy locks, trimming overgrown shrubs, or painting fences. How can older people help youth? By acting as mentors or lending an ear to listen when youth need to talk about problems that could lead to violence. Members of each group can collect information on topics relating to crime prevention, such as consumer fraud awareness, vandalism prevention, conflict mediation, and date rape prevention. The two groups can then share information and discuss the topics. Best of all, youth and seniors can work together on projects to organize neighborhoods, develop schoolwide crime prevention efforts, help younger children learn crime prevention techniques, and arrange community

from the administrator

Lending an ear and lending a hand across generations—that's what intergenerational programs are all about. By planning projects together, young and old alike benefit from each other's insights, skills, and experience. As this Bulletin explains, such projects also strengthen community ties and improve the well-being of all involved. Best of all, by working with seniors—whether to decrease vandalism or to host a senior citizen prom—you will get to know one another and overcome any stereotypes. You may even make some special friends!

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cleanups. They may even plan and attend social events together!

How Does a Two-Generation Program Prevent or Reduce Crime?

By bringing together the remarkable energy, skills, and insights of two generations, not to mention the idealism of youth and the wisdom of age, the community gains a powerful volunteer force for a wide range of crime prevention initiatives. The range of projects is limited only by the participants' imaginations!

How Do You Get Started?

If you want to work with seniors on a project, start by gathering a core group of interested youth to talk to seniors' groups and people who work with older citizens—either at community, recreation, or activity centers for seniors or at nursing homes, assisted living complexes, hospitals, or similar settings.

Find out what older people in your community think about today's youth and discuss how you and other youth in your group perceive seniors. Stereotypes—that is, oversimplified or prejudiced opinions based solely on the fact that people belong to a particular group (by age, race, sex, etc.)—can be a problem for both groups. The first step in building a good working relationship is to correct misconceptions right away. Come together, get to know each other, and disprove those myths![1]

Spend some time role-playing with seniors and other youth. In this exercise, one person takes the role of another. Each acts out what it's like to be the other person—how they think, what they like, how they feel. Those who aren't participating can observe what the players say about each population. When the role-play is over, the entire group can discuss what everyone learned about youth and older people.

Another way to learn about older people and how you can connect with them is by talking to the social activities director at a local senior center or retirement community. This individual can provide special insights into what concerns older people, what activities they enjoy, and how to communicate with them.

It's important to plan your project jointly. If both age groups plan it together, everyone is more likely to work toward its success and value its results. You will need to form an intergenerational committee, balancing the membership between youth and older people. Check in your community or with national networks such as Generations United to find out if someone nearby can provide training in how to form these groups.

Sharing leadership by having cochairs (one from each generation) can help dispel fears and doubts, especially in the early stages of your project. Set up a regular meeting time for the group. You may want to trade off meeting places between youth- and senior-focused locations (for example, meet at your high school one month and the senior center the next), but make sure it is easy to keep track of meeting locations.

Once you have formed a committee or working group, spend some time having members share information about skills, interests, and experiences. Understanding what each group and individual brings to the project can help you make the most out of the talents available. One way to share information about group members is to conduct intergenerational interviews at your early meetings. Youth-senior pairs interview each other, and then each partner

[1] For more information on the benefits of youth working with older citizens, refer to *Cross-Age Teaching*, a Youth in Action Bulletin available at no charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section.

introduces the other and presents the person's skills, background, and interests to the group. Maybe someone who is experienced or comfortable working with both youth and seniors could facilitate the interviews and provide additional training in ways for youth and older citizens to work together effectively.

The group's major task is to decide on and carry out a project. To do so, determine the problem(s) in your community that you want to address, identify possible solutions, plan the steps needed to implement these solutions, line up resources and volunteers, set the plan in motion, and evaluate results when you're done. Then celebrate your work! Whenever possible, have older citizens and youth work together on a task instead of letting them split up into groups based on age. To make sure everyone is "on the same page," it's helpful to agree on key steps up front. Review the group's progress as it reaches each step before moving on to the next one.

When working across generations, you may find that people have different ways of talking, levels of experience, and attitudes toward risk taking. Don't be surprised, though, to discover that some youth and seniors have more in common with one another than they do with many of their peers!

Pay attention to communication issues. Using flip charts and a chalkboard at meetings to record key points can help ensure that everyone understands what has been decided. Distributing written minutes of meetings also reminds everyone of tasks they've taken on and eliminates the chance of misunderstandings about events and responsibilities. Be sure to talk with other groups interested in the project: the school or group providing your youth volunteers, centers or organizations that the older participants may belong to, your local association for the aging, and school and community newspapers.

Although this Bulletin focuses on joint projects, don't overlook unique ways for each group to serve the other:

- Seniors can be mentors to youth.
- Older professionals can help youth learn new skills or provide youth with advice on education or career decisions.
- Youth can provide errand, escort, or transportation services to elders who need help getting to appointments or who are afraid or unable to travel around the community on their own.
- Youth can make daily phone calls or visits to elders who are homebound.
- Youth can prepare meals for seniors or help them with housework, yard work, or home repairs.

Some high schools, including two in the Washington, D.C., area (Park View High School in Maryland and Loudoun Valley High School in Virginia), host annual senior citizens proms. For these events, seniors are invited to attend a formal dance with the high school's students.

Whether held in a high school cafeteria or a nearby hall, a senior citizens prom provides a wonderful opportunity for members of two generations to spend time together and learn about each other. Seniors teach youth dances like the jitterbug and the Charleston, and youth teach seniors modern dance crazes. Most important, those attending the prom share experiences and learn what's going on in the lives of older or younger people in the community. By doing so, they bridge the age gap, and may even make long-lasting friendships!

How Do You Keep Your Project Going?

Keeping your project going depends on what you're doing. Maintaining the two-generation

relationship requires attention. You'll want to recruit additional youth and older citizens to continue and expand your efforts. Remember that newcomers will need the same training that original group members received at the beginning—on disproving stereotypes, discovering skills, and bridging communication gaps. Don't assume that the training will "just happen." Make it happen. Invite experienced youth-senior pairs to be trainers and mentors to newcomers.

Look for ways to "freshen" leadership among youth and seniors by periodically choosing or bringing in new leaders, or providing current cochairs with special training. Be open to new ideas—whether they are for whole new projects or different approaches to your current project. Sharing success with all volunteers is also important. And don't forget to share information on accomplishments with the news media and organizations that have helped you!

What Are Some of the Challenges You Will Face?

Bringing together two groups that seem so different can be uncomfortable at first for everyone. Encourage youth to give the process a chance. Find out what they're really worried about, or why they feel nervous. Perhaps a youth's grandparent died recently, and the reminder of loss is painful. Maybe someone has had very little, or even negative, contact with older people. If necessary, schedule time for an open discussion where youth may bring their concerns to the surface and share their fears. Encourage everyone to be honest. Then discuss concerns with both groups present.

Also make time to address any concerns or fears that older people may have about working with youth. Seniors, for example, might feel isolated from or afraid of younger members of the community. They may have had an unpleasant experience with a young person. An older individual who has suffered the loss of a grandchild or other special young person may also worry that working with youth will bring back painful memories.

Using time wisely and scheduling activities are additional challenges that you will face. Remember that both youth and adults—especially today's active seniors—have busy schedules. Make sure that everyone carries a share of the load, so that people don't get burned out and drop out of the program.

Scheduling is challenging because students have academic commitments, and many have afterschool jobs or participate in athletics, clubs, and other extracurricular activities that take up lots of time. Likewise, seniors may be available to volunteer only a few days a week. Many older Americans travel or participate in sports, arts and crafts, community affairs, and other activities that account for sizable portions of their time. Many are busy visiting with children and grandchildren. Scheduling regular meetings, distributing written minutes of meetings (to keep absent members up to date), and agreeing up front on exactly how much time volunteers are expected to commit can

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. *This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:*

- *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- *Planning a Successful Project.*
- *Lining Up Resources.*
- *Acting on Your Plans.*
- *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section. Good luck!

help prevent schedule-related problems for your group.

Deciding on which project(s) to tackle is another challenge. Youth and seniors may not, for instance, readily agree on which problems are important or which are important (and manageable) enough for your group to address. Your group will need to work together to reach a consensus.

It will also need to address specific needs of each generation. One such need is transportation. Keep in mind that some older people are not able to drive. Others may not feel comfortable driving at night or in certain types of weather. Likewise, the youth in your group may have transportation problems. Many may not be licensed to drive or may not have access to a car. To provide transportation and help meet other needs, you may have to involve additional people—such as parents or teachers. Assessing the talents of group members, reviewing available resources, and prioritizing problems and opportunities can also help.

What Are Some of the Rewards?

Beyond the rewards that result directly from your project, research suggests that youth and seniors who work together strengthen their ties to the community, their sense of belonging, their skills in dealing with others, and their understanding of the other generation. Youth form friendships and gain personal and professional guidance that significantly enriches their lives. They also gain a new appreciation for history, having heard some of it first hand, and feel good about helping older members of the community view youth with less suspicion, concern, and fear.

How Can You Evaluate Your Project?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what to evaluate and how to do so. The purpose of any evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."[2]

The best way to start evaluating your project is to reflect on your original goals. Did youth and older people work together? Did they learn about each other? Be sure to include an evaluation step—such as a questionnaire, suggestion box, or formal survey—in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

You will probably want to show that your project does one or all of the following:

- ◇ Eliminates or reduces stereotypes or misconceptions about youth and seniors in your community.
- ◇ Provides opportunities to learn about and appreciate the skills, experiences, and viewpoints of persons from a different generation.
- ◇ Eliminates or reduces older citizens' fear or suspicion of youth in the community.
- ◇ Educates and raises community members' awareness of the problems or issues that your group chose to address.
- ◇ Facilitates the collection and sharing of information on topics relating to crime that are of special concern to seniors and youth

[2] National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986. For more information on evaluating your program, refer to *Does Your Youth Program Work? Seven Keys to Evaluation*, a Youth in Action Bulletin available at no charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section.

(such as the prevention of vandalism, consumer fraud, and date rape).

Continue to evaluate the relationships between the two groups, and address any concerns immediately. Conducting a survey at the beginning of your project can also be helpful by showing how each group views the other, what worries they have about working together, and what opportunities they believe the joint activity offers. Performing a followup survey at the end of your project, or 6 months or a year after completion, will show whether attitudes have changed, whether fears have decreased, and what positive (or negative) discoveries each group has made about the other.

In evaluating your intergenerational project, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◇ Reduces crime or fear of crime in your community.
- ◇ Is cost effective.
- ◇ Has a lasting impact.
- ◇ Attracts support and resources.
- ◇ Makes people feel safer and better about being members of your school or community.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Enjoy your project—And your special new friends!

Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

American Association of Retired Persons
601 E Street NW.
Washington, DC 20049
800–424–3410
Internet: www.aarp.org

Generations United
c/o Child Welfare League of America
444 First Street NW.
Washington, DC 20001
202–628–2952
202–638–4004 (Fax)

Interages Resource Center
3950 Ferrara Drive
Wheaton, MD 20906
301–949–3551
301–949–3190 (Fax)
E-mail: interag86@aol.com

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736
301–519–5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
Internet: www.ncpc.org

National Senior Service Corps
Corporation for National Service
1201 New York Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20525
202–606–5000
Internet: www.nationalservice.org

Triad
National Sheriffs' Association
1450 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314–3490
703–836–7827
Internet: www.sheriffs.org

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The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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